

Members of the GAE committee, I am excited to testify in strong opposition to HB 5704 and 5717, two bills concerning mandatory voting.

I'm sure we all agree that 100% voter participation is a worthy goal, but this does not justify an unworthy means. The heart of the issue as I see it is that mandatory voting strikes at the core of liberty.

Liberty is a gift from God. It is not a gift from the government to the people; liberty is intrinsic within our nature as human beings who are created by God and, like Him, we are free agents with a will to choose.

You cannot force a free citizen to enjoy the blessings of liberty and still call him a free citizen. To force a free human being to make a particular choice is to remove his ability to choose.

I particularly take issue with the third clause of HB 5704: "any such elector who did not cast a ballot at an election [shall] either respond to such form with a valid reason or be fined for not responding."

I say in reply, "Absolutely not." The fact that I am free is valid reason enough to not cast a ballot.

Now we still have the question of how to increase civic engagement in a free society. I'd like to give you a positive example of doing this not through coercion, but inspiration. Years ago my father heard some lectures and realized he didn't even know who his elected representatives were. He caught sight both of the liberty that was his and the carelessness with which he held it. He started educating himself and getting involved at a local level and raised his family in a culture of exercising both the privileges and responsibilities of freedom.

Not only has our family exercised and valued our own freedoms because of my dad, we have become leaders in teaching others to do the same in an organic, peer-to-peer, freedom-loving way. We have increased the civic engagement of our friends and family and it's no exaggeration to say that it started with one man, my father. The alternative to coercion is loving and exercising one's liberty and inspiring others to do the same.

Mandatory voting may claim to be for the greater good. I would argue that liberty itself is the greater good and that we should never pay any price that desecrates the treasure of liberty.

Please oppose HB 5704 and 5717.

- Susanna Bennett